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ABSTRACT

For the American woman, educated and trained in the speech profession, marriage and motherhood induce a shock for which she is unprepared. Society still expects the main responsibility of child rearing to be that of the mother, while the speech profession, which has prepared all students to be teachers and scholars, is uncooperative in providing either a sabbatical leave for parenthood or part-time employment when the mother is ready to re-enter the profession. As evidence of such negligence of professionally trained mothers, of the eight women honored at the recent meeting of the Speech Communication Association in New York, six had never been married and neither of the other two was a parent. Obviously, the speech profession consists of successful, mature women devoted exclusively to their careers and young, single women. The missing middle group should be allowed back in the profession. (JM)

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SPEECH: AN OPENING OR A DEAD END FOR MARRIED WOMEN

Judith Pulin Forusz

No one can estimate the shock which getting married and having a child gives to the educated American woman. Up to the point of motherhood, most bright women participate fully in the work, recreation, and aspirations of the males of their own age. From kindergarten through graduate school they read the same books, participate in the same seminars, compete in many of the same contests, talk the same talk, follow a similar daily routine, and make similar plans for dazzling the world. During those years there is no such thing a "women's work" or "man's work". For the men and women seriously engaged in the educational process there is only the world's work and the world's pleasures.

Then comes the shock and the parting of the ways. While the advent of parenthood hardly alters the daily routine of the father, the mother puts gainful employment and adult stimulation behind her and is catipulted into a home from which there are limited avenues of escape. There she sits--frustrated, confused, disappointed, and above all, lonely.

What is the speech profession doing for the thousands of women it has trained and is presently educating to enable them to enter the world of 1974 and realisticaly

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cope with the decades ahead?

Let us look at some of the realities of both our profession and our society:

First, most educated women, like their male counterparts, wish to pursue a meaningful occupation, choose a life's companion, establish a home, and produce children. Yet, the advances of the women's liberation movement not withstanding, the bulk of the daily responsibility of child rearing still falls primarily on the mother and most likely will continue to do so for some time to come.

Secondly, most university departments of speech communication prepare their male and female graduate students to be scholars and teachers. If any discrimination towards women does exists at this level, it consists of them being directed into master's rather than doctoral programs and being encouraged to teach on the secondary instead of the college level. But assuming that no discrimination exists and the female student's choice of program is dictated only by her interests and abilities, what then of the future? Upon completion of all necessary degrees, she enters the job market and begins her career as a professional teacher and scholar. But as soon as she chooses to add wife and mother to her credentials the profession which has spent years nurturing her now turns its back on her. An investment of time, money, and personal involvement is now coyly forgotten. What will happen to our female professional?

First of all, she is not offered a sabaticalleave for parenting as few institutions provide any such consideration for the primary caretaker of children. She may receive a "maternity leave" which covers the last weeks of pregnancy, delivery, and some time for body restoration.

If she does accept the role of primary caretaker, her real trouble will begin when she tries to re-enter the profession. Her first choice--part-time employment--no longer exists. The market is glutted with qualified teachers and a harried department chairman no longer faces the spectre of overflowing sections of introductory courses which must be staffed by supplementary personnel. Those days are long gone. The road to full-time employment is covered with even greater obstacles. If her hiatus from the profession has been greater than three years, she is out of touch with the new thinking, research, and jargon and must commence her own crash course or reenter graduate school. In the market place, she is in competition both with male colleagues who have not been professionally inactive for the past few years, as well as the latest crop of fresh and eager graduates.

Should she try to enter the world of business and industry she is stymied by the fact that she is over specialized and somewhat inflexible. In short, she has been programmed to be a teacher and scholar and the computer has made few provisions for anything else. Where does she turn? What does she do now? In most cases nothing.

At this point in her life, she may dearly wish she had married at eighteen, produced a raft of children, and now, with her nest empty, was ready to commence her college career. For everywhere she looks some eager dean is holding open the doors of learning for America's housewives. In the 1970's a college education is the new Lydia Pinkham for a woman's ills and new programs, new offices, and new deans are devoted to the mature female undergraduate. But where are the courses, the programs, the counsellors for the mature woman with a master's or doctor's degree who needs refreshing or retraining?

Nowhere was it more evident that these women are the forgotten members of the speech profession than at our recent SCA convention in New York. At that convention the women's caucus sponsored a program ironically entitled "Good News." The purpose of the program was to honor successful women in the profession, holding them up as role models for other women to emulate. As one of the participants in that program I was struck by two things. First of all, of the eight women honored, six had never married and of the two who had married, neither were parents. Is total dedication to work the price which women in the speech profession must pay to achieve eminence? Do we ask the same degree of devotion and self-sacrifice of their male counterparts? I hardly think so. Now let's look at the second half of the picture, the members of the women's caucus who were invited to shout the "good news." There

were six participants in the program and of these four were young, unmarried women in the early stages of their careers.

This is the "Good News" about the speech profession for women, ladies and gentlemen: our profession consists primarily of two groups--highly successful mature women who have devoted themselves almost exclusively to their work and young, single women just commencing their careers. The middle is missing.

It is time we put the middle group back into the speech profession. It is time we availed ourselves of the talents of this forgotten group of women who could contribute so much.